

## Internet for Education

The Internet. What it has done for me educational and scholastically is nothing short of a miracle. With the recent events of the past three years I couldn't have possibly even imagined that I could get a college education and a degree in accounting without the use of the Internet. I am old enough to remember life before the World Wide Web. I remember hearing that term in the early days; the World Wide Web. I couldn't even comprehend what they were talking about. The web; what's that? Computers in our homes; that can't be possible? Or could it? It was possible and it did come to pass. And the world has been forever changed because of it.

My story begins as I approach the age of forty-nine and make a monumental decision to return to school. I thought to myself, "You must be crazy." But with the unrest and dissatisfaction with my then current work situation, school made sense. But still, with the thought of working full time, and I mean full time, it was a daunting task that I had set before me. The fact that I worked in a manufacturing environment, worked rotating shifts, weekends, and put in somewhere between fifty to sixty hours per week, made attending school through normal channels very unrealistic. The thoughts dancing in my head to go back to school started in that summer of 2007. I was very unhappy with my job and with my bosses and had contemplated several times to just walk out the door. It was my wife who gave me some good advice and said, "If you are so unhappy, quit complaining and whining about your situation and do something about it." She was absolutely correct. So on Saturday August 18, 2007 on the last day of fall registration at Illinois Central College in Peoria, Illinois my wife said, "Let's go" and off we went. We arrived at the registration office at 1:45 p.m. with only fifteen minutes before the office closed. A wonderful lady helped me get registered within those last fifteen minutes of registration and my journey was about to begin. I signed up for three classes that fall, two were Internet classes and one was a correspondence course. One must realize that I had had no college experience in my life and to start out with just Internet classes was a little unnerving. So armed with a newfound determination and a very supportive wife, my journey into the unknown realm of Internet education began.

My first foray into an online class was a real eye opener. My first class was an English composition class. I hadn't written a formal paper in thirty years and here I was required to write an essay using MLA to cite my references. What the heck was MLA? So, to the Internet I went and did a Google search of MLA, and I was off and running and I haven't stopped yet. The Internet has proven to be such an invaluable resource for doing school work, especially when it comes to writing papers. The amount of time and effort saved by doing online research is just incomprehensible. Two things come to mind when I think about that first semester of school is that it could have never been accomplished without the Internet; the time to actually take the courses and the time to devote to research for writing assignments. Neither could have been accomplished without the Internet. Working fifty plus hours a week like I did didn't leave much time to devote to going to college, but with the advent of online classes it has become a reality for me.

The convenience associated with taking online courses is just fantastic. For example, when I worked afternoon turn, I would get home around eleven o'clock p.m., go to my home office space and do school work on the computer until about two or three in the morning.

A benefit of the Internet to me is the flexibility it gives in not only time but environment. For example my wife and I were actually able to go on a short vacation and I could still maintain contact with my school load. I took a laptop with us and through the use of Wi-Fi; I was able to connect no matter where we were at and still do my homework, take quizzes and maintain pace with my course and not fall behind. It was great and I could really relax when I got done with the school work. Again the Internet is a great benefit and tool and one that I do not take for granted or lightly.

I was always under the misconception that I could not return to college and earn a degree as long as I worked a full time job. Boy was I wrong about that. With the advent of the Internet everything has changed. There are no more time constraints, no more geographical restraints, no more anything. It is all at your fingertips anytime of the day or night.

This was not the first time that I had contemplated going back to school. In the late nineteen-eighties I was facing long layoffs and the very real possibility of losing my job. I considered going back to school at that time to pursue a degree but with a wife and a young baby and the fact that my wife did not work, I couldn't afford not to work and go to school

full time. I did consider going to school part time but with all the family obligations and what not, I talked myself out of doing it then because I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I just couldn't see the end only the present long road to get there. That was the second biggest mistake of my life. The first one being not going to college right out of high school. After working in the steel industry for thirty years I am finally paying for my decision to abstain from going to college right after high school, in lieu of a good paycheck. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Back in 1988 there were no Internet classes to take, so the only option was to go to school in person and that takes time. Time I didn't have or time I didn't want to devote to this end. Ah, to be young and stupid.

One of the many challenges that I faced was in my second semester when I took my first accounting core class online. That was not a pleasant experience. I was definitely getting a C in the class with one test to go. The professor made things even harder for me when he changed the rules in the middle of the semester. When we started the class the online tests allowed you to go back and work problems if you skipped them. But for some reason, unbeknownst to me, he decided to make it so if you passed a question you couldn't go back. So if you were stuck on a problem then you had a decision to make. Either you moved on and missed the question or you stayed on the current problem and in my opinion, waste valuable time that you would need to complete the test. I decided for the last exam to just take my time and work the problems one at a time consecutively and I would finish what I could get finished and my grade would be what it would be. Well, I didn't finish the exam but what I did finish must have been good enough to push my grade to a B for the semester. I never did find out what I scored on that final exam and I really don't know how I got that grade, but I was thankful all the same. It was after this class that I decided no more online accounting classes for me. This would be my one departure from taking as many online classes as possible.

There are so many advantages of taking online classes for me, but mainly that I can attend a class at anytime, from anywhere. I can attend classes no matter what work schedule I am working and I can even attend when traveling, whether it be for business or pleasure, I can access my classes from anywhere in the United States that has Internet access. Being that the course material is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, gives me the

opportunity to re-read lectures, discussions, explanations and comments. Another nice benefit is that being behind a computer screen can give me anonymity and provides a less intimidating atmosphere than I would encounter in the actual classroom. Taking Internet classes gives me time to formulate my thoughts making me able to think about my replies as to when, how, and what to say. I can post my comments when I am ready. This is a real benefit because sometimes when you are in a classroom situation and the conversation is moving and other people are interacting, sometimes you can't get your point of view out until the discussion has passed you by and by that time it is too late to comment. This online environment has also made it so I can talk more openly with my teachers and other students. I have noticed that I am a little bit more assertive in an online class than I am in real life. I used to think that was a bad thing but I believe it has been helpful as it is encouraging me to speak up and to voice my opinion when presented the opportunity. I believe in the long run this will be a benefit to me in the working business world where I will need to speak up when needed.

Another great benefit about Internet based education is that you can access the college's library from the comfort of your home at any time of the day or night. You can research articles, eBook content, and check the availability of normal book material which you can reserve and pick up at your convenience. This has been a great time saver for me, which as someone who works full time, this has been a true lifesaver, giving time back to me that I so desperately need.

Another benefit to taking online courses is what I call the low cost association. By that I mean not necessarily dollars and cents, but other tangible things, such as no expenses outlaid for gas and wear and tear on my automobile. And again, the time it gives back to my life. This fact alone is unfathomable because time is just about the most important commodity a person can have.

The ability to earn a degree online began in 1989 with the University of Phoenix offering classes to help students earn bachelors' and masters degrees (3). Online education has expanded throughout the past decade as evidenced by studies done by Babson Survey Research Group, the Sloan Consortium, and the College Board. According to their statistics, online enrollment was at over 3.9 million students during the fall semester of 2007. That correlates to more than twenty percent of all college students enrolled in postsecondary

education are now taking online classes (8). And the trend is continuing with research numbers showing that by the end of 2002 over eighty-four percent of all four-year accredited colleges and universities were offering online education classes (2).

Today it is even possible to earn a degree without ever stepping a foot on a college campus. John Campbell remarked in a discussion thread reply about the dangers that can be associated with taking classes from a “virtual college”, which is a college with no physical campus (1). He pointed to a very good article about the possibility of being scammed in the pursuit of an online degree. In the article it relayed the sad story of a woman’s online degree being worthless. This points out the very important fact to research the possible online college candidate and make sure that the degree indeed comes from an accredited university. The article referenced what is labeled degree mills, which hand out diplomas that aren’t even worth the paper they are printed on (4). John’s comment was about the importance of taking college classes from an accredited college and not a “virtual college.” A point well taken, but there are in fact, several good “virtual colleges” today with Jones International University being the first accredited college in 1996 to exist fully online (6).

Mr. Campbell also brought up a good point with this question, “Are online educations taken seriously in the business world?” With the advent of just about every college in the nation offering Internet classes the answer is yes. The business world places great faith in online degrees, but also adds that more respectability is accomplished when going through an already established and accredited college as say a Duke University (4).

Mickey Killman brought up the question about the advantages and disadvantages of obtaining a degree through online sources (7). A major advantage of pursuing online degrees or taking a mostly Internet curriculum is that you’re showing potential future employers that you have initiative, ambition, and drive to do what it takes to get the job done. You are demonstrating that you will be a self motivated and reliable employee. Continuing this thought, recent research shows that employers today are much more enthusiastic about people that pursue Internet degrees than they were in years past (5). In fact, sources such as Careerbuilder.com say many employers stand up and take notice of people who can demonstrate the ability and the desire to seek online degrees (8).

And to reiterate this thought even more and how the business world has changed its opinion of online education listen to how Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, responded to this question, “Would you hire someone with an online business degree?” “To count out a candidate based on an online degree may be shortsighted,” he responded. “People working all day and studying online all night have the kind of grrrr most companies could use.”(9) I think that pretty much says it all with regards to the importance of Internet education.

I’ve often thought during my journey when I looked down the dark tunnel of education and saw a light, I wondered is that the light at the end of the tunnel or is it the headlight of an oncoming train coming to run me over. With only summer session and this fall semester to go, I am convinced now it is the light at the end of the tunnel. Hallelujah!